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SQUIRRELS PLANT BLACK WALNUT GROVES.

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Bouncing along the fence rail like a bit of animated thistledown, he manages to convey the impression that he hasn't a serious thought in his head, and few would suspect that the squirrel is the chap who supplied the American Army with the wood for their gunstocks, though he didn't mean to do it of course. He was looking after his own food supply, saving the resources of summer against the famine of winter, but incidentally he placed a big deposit to man's account in Nature's savings bank.

The Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, is authority for the statement that the squirrel, through his habit of burying nuts, has been the most important agent in the reproduction of the black walnut groves. The timber from the groves planted years ago by the squirrels satisfied an important need during the war when walnut was used to make gunstocks and airplane propellers. Substitute woods for gunstocks have been tried by many manufacturers, but none has been found that proved as suitable for this purpose as the black walnut.

Plants Nuts Wisely

The fence-rail forester seems to have the needs of the black walnut in his mind when he goes about his work. As a sapling this species can not endure much shade; if it is to survive it must be planted in rich soil where the sunlight will fall upon it. The squirrel has set out whole groves by burying the nuts in the open areas at the forest edges, and also many single trees by planting in the fence corners. Why he buries the nuts is evident enough, but why he

leaves some of them to sprout and grow is not so clear. It may be that an unusually severe winter -- or a hunter or an owl or something else -- kills the little banker before he has time to draw out his savings. An early spring may make him independent of his storage plant. Or it may be that he has an absent-minded streak in his graceful make-up and just forgets where he puts a thing. Whatever the cause, humanity profits from the result.

In Bulletin 933, a professional paper by the Forest Service, the growth and management of black walnut timber is discussed. In reviewing the present supply of this valuable wood the specialists estimate roughly that there are 821,000,000 feet of black walnut in this country. This figure is approximate only, and it is well to remember that only 50 per cent of it is available to commerce. The remaining 50 per cent is growing in inaccessible spots, or is held by owners who refuse to sell.

Black walnut is valuable, it is easy to secure a stand, and it makes a fairly rapid growth. There is always a demand for it and, in war time, an exceptional demand at high prices. Under these circumstances it would seem that large commercial groves would be the common thing, but the fact that this tree requires the use of good agricultural soil handicaps commercial production. Before the war the annual cut of black walnut ran between 40 and 50 million feet a year, but the inroads made upon the groves during the hostilities have considerably reduced the supply now available.

Careful management of the existing groves and the establishment of new ones wherever economic conditions will permit will be necessary measures if the needs of the future are to be met.

Black walnut has exceptional qualities when planted as an ornamental tree. With the exception of a tent caterpillar, its foliage appears to be nearly free from insect pests that damage the beauty of other shade trees. It also furnishes a nut which is of edible and commercial value.